United Nations A/58/530

General Assembly

Distr.: General
22 October 2003

Original: English

Fifty-eighth session
Agenda items 121 and 125

Proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005

Pattern of conferences

Improving and modernizing the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi in order to accommodate adequately major meetings and conferences

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

In its resolutions 55/222, 56/242 and 57/283 B, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to consider improving and modernizing the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi in order to accommodate adequately major meeting and conferences.

The review undertaken by the Secretariat in response to those requests indicated a pressing need to modernize the United Nations conference facilities in Nairobi, as they no longer meet the needs of the institutional clients of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, namely, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). The proposed modernization, the cost of which is estimated at $3,479,000, would allow the United Nations Office at Nairobi to address urgent upgrading problems, fulfil current meeting standards and increase seating capacity through a rationalization of space, and thus to serve adequately the UNON institutional clients. The General Assembly is requested to authorize $3,479,000 for the modernization of the conference centre, to be financed from: (a) resources already proposed under section 33 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 in the amount of $1,427,000; (b) uncommitted resources available in the construction-in-progress account in the amount of $913,000; and (c) an additional provision of $1,139,000 to be authorized under the terms of resolution 42/211 and its annex, governing the use and operation of the contingency fund.

* The issuance of the report was delayed due to the need to complete consultations within the Secretariat on possible options to address the concerns of the General Assembly as expressed in its resolution 57/283 B.

03-57780 (E) 291003

The review showed that the modernized conference facilities could fully meet the requirements of the Governing Councils of UNEP and UN-Habitat. However, those facilities may still not have sufficient seating capacity to serve major United Nations system conferences at Nairobi. The possibility of constructing three additional conference rooms was also considered, at a cost of $4,228,800. Bearing in mind the occasional nature of major United Nations system meetings taking place at Nairobi over the last few years, the Secretariat is of the view that the issue of the construction of the additional conference rooms should be reviewed at a later stage in the light of experience to be gained from operating the modernized conference facilities in 2006 and 2007.

I. Introduction

1. In its resolutions 55/222 of 23 December 2000 and 56/242 of 24 December 2001, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to consider improving and modernizing the existing conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi in order to accommodate adequately major meetings and conferences. In its resolution 57/283 B of 15 April 2003, the General Assembly noted with concern that the severe constraint of adequate conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi posed a serious challenge for any further increase in their utilization and reiterated its request to the Secretary-General, contained in resolution 56/242, to consider improving and modernizing them.

2. A review of possible options to address the concern expressed in the above-mentioned resolutions was undertaken by the Secretariat, including measures to increase the seating capacity and improve the technological and physical condition of the existing facilities. In addition, the possibility of further expanding the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi has been considered.

II. Review of requirements for conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

3. The Nairobi duty station is the headquarters of the United Nations Office at Nairobi and two United Nations programmes, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). It also houses a number of regional offices of United Nations specialized agencies, such as the International Civil Aviation Organization, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Food Programme, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Political Office for Somalia, as well as country offices of United Nations organizations. In total, 53 offices of the funds, programmes and agencies of the United Nations system, with a total of more than 2,400 staff, have operations in Nairobi. As a result, the duty station is the site of important global and regional meetings.

4. The United Nations compound in Nairobi is located on 140 acres of land and consists of 19 office blocks, accommodating approximately 1,800 personnel. There are 23,139 square metres of office space and 9,251 square metres of common or miscellaneous areas (conference rooms, PABX room, training rooms, computer labs, clinic, etc.) of which the conference centre occupies 4,750 square metres. The present conference servicing capacity of the United Nations Office at Nairobi comprises eight conference rooms with a total seating capacity of 1,439 (see annex I).

5. The continuing increase in the number of United Nations system organizations and their staff at the compound results in an ever-increasing demand for meeting rooms and conference facilities. Over the last four years, the number of meetings held at the United Nations Office at Nairobi conference centre has increased by 18 per cent, and it is expected to increase further in the biennium 2004-2005, by another 5 per cent. Among those meetings are major recent conferences, such as the eleventh Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna (April 2000), the fifth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (May 2000), regular sessions

of the UNEP Governing Council and the Commission on Human Settlements (the Governing Council of UN-Habitat) and the second session of the preparatory committee for Istanbul + 5 (February 2001). Detailed statistics on the actual and projected meeting workload are contained in annex II to the present report.

6. The current conference facilities were constructed in 1983, during the second phase of development of the United Nations Office at Nairobi. The conference area was equipped at that time with analog sound systems, which are largely outdated and require urgent upgrading, as spare parts are no longer available. The review showed that the analog sound equipment requires replacement by modern technology-based audio systems, complemented with digital video presentation facilities. The lighting and acoustics of the conference rooms are very poor and require improvement. Conference rooms have problems with outside noise, and, as there is no means of regulating temperature, become, depending on the season, hot or cold.

7. In terms of meetings accommodation, the seating capacity and versatility of the conference centre no longer meet the requirements of the UNON institutional clients, namely, UNEP and UN-Habitat, for which they were initially constructed, due to the large number of participants from non-governmental organizations now attending meetings. The participatory character of United Nations meetings, with the substantial representation of non-governmental organizations, a great number of parallel events and regional group consultations, as witnessed in the last few years, cannot be accommodated within existing facilities. The total capacity requirements for participants in the major conferences referred to in paragraph 5 above were typically from 1,500 to 2,000. Those conferences could be fully serviced only at considerable extra cost, by renting interpretation and other meeting equipment, tables and chairs and by converting all vacant or temporarily unused offices and meeting spaces at the United Nations complex into official meeting rooms. Furthermore, to meet the demand for additional meeting rooms, all materials of the United Nations library in Nairobi and of the documentation and reference centre were temporarily relocated, and the library space was converted into offices, a business centre, press facilities and meeting rooms. Moreover, offices and meeting rooms of international organizations located in Nairobi outside the compound had to be rented. Also, tented structures were erected to accommodate the demand for meeting space for non-governmental participants.

8. The present conference facilities can provide for a major meeting with six-language interpretation services only in Conference Rooms 1 (436 participants) and 2 (528 participants). Room 2 can be combined with Conference Rooms 3 and 4 (188 participants each), but Rooms 3 and 4 can accommodate only four-language interpretation services. Four smaller rooms, with a capacity of 15 to 28 participants, which are in greatest demand for daily events, including regional group consultations, have inadequate seating capacity and are unable to accommodate interpretation requirements. The existing configuration of the rooms is not flexible enough to meet the changing requirements of the client offices.

9. The offices adjacent to the conference rooms, previously dedicated to the secretariats, officials and organizers of the hosted meetings, are currently occupied by the newly created Interpretation Section of the Division of Conference Services and by staff of other United Nations organizations, due to a general shortage of office space in the complex. This has reduced the office space available for conference-related staff in the conference area.

10. Given the requirements of client offices and the physical condition of the present conference structures, there is a pressing need to modernize the United Nations conference facilities at Nairobi. The modernization would allow the United Nations Office at Nairobi to address urgent upgrading problems and to fulfil current meeting standards, in terms of scope and quality of services and increased seating capacity. As a first step in that modernization, a full renovation of Conference Rooms 1, 5, 6, 7 and 8 is required. The modernization would include the installation of modern simultaneous interpretation equipment and upgrading of the sound, air-conditioning and data-distribution systems. In the next step, the issue of seating capacity could be addressed by rationalizing the use of space and combining Conference Rooms 2, 3 and 4. These measures would increase the existing capacity by some 300 seats and create a large new conference room with 1,200 seats and six-language interpretation services. That conference room could then meet the requirements of plenary meetings of the Governing Councils of UNEP and UN-Habitat.

11. While, after the modernization, the existing conference capacity of the United Nations Office at Nairobi could by and large meet the demand for services, that capacity may still be insufficient for major conferences with a large number of parallel meetings and more than 1,700 participants, such as the eleventh Conference of the Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Flora and Fauna, held in 2000. A review of possibilities for further expansion of the conference facilities through the construction of additional conference rooms has also been undertaken, bearing in mind the above-mentioned requirements. It has been estimated that in order to meet such requirements an additional 4,026 square metres would be required, including 2,496 square metres of conference rooms, 990 square metres of necessary passages and 540 square metres of associated office space facilities. These additional conference facilities would include two new conference rooms (A and B, 676 square metres and 684 square metres respectively) and a modular conference area (C) of 1,136 square metres, which turn could be divided into four medium-sized conference rooms. These conference rooms would also be equipped with modern interpretation and data-processing equipment and provide adequate working conditions. The seating capacity of these additional structures is estimated at 1,200. Combined with the capacity of the existing upgraded structures, that would bring the total seating capacity of the United Nations Office at Nairobi conference facilities to 2,939. The additional structures could be built on top of the roof slab of the existing buildings and be interconnected by covered walkways. The overall aesthetics, accessibility and communication with the existing conference facilities are supportive of this option. For illustrative purposes, the location of the additional conference facilities within the compound can be seen in annex III.

III. Preliminary cost estimates

12. The options outlined above appear to be the most practical solution to address the problem of the current inadequate conference space available in Nairobi to the United Nations organizations with operations in Kenya. It should be noted in this regard that no viable commercial alternatives are available at the duty station for meeting activities.

13. The cost of phase I of modernizing the existing United Nations Office at Nairobi conference facilities is estimated at $3,479,000. Given the demand for the conference services, the modernization of Conference Rooms 1, 5, 6, 7 and 8 has been determined to be a priority. The cost of this component of the modernization has been estimated at $1,427,000. As regards the modernization of Conference Rooms 2, 3 and 4, a further provision of $2,052,000, would be required. It is estimated that, subject to availability of funding in the biennium 2004-2005, the modernization of the existing conference facilities as detailed in paragraph 10 above could be implemented during the biennium 2004-2005.

14. As regards phase II, the construction of the additional conference facilities as detailed in paragraph 11 above, it is estimated that the cost of the construction would be approximately $4,228,800 (at current prices), as follows:

Breakdown of construction costs

(United States dollars)

Contractual services relating to detailed design plan and cost estimates	363 000
Construction of additional conference facilities, including site work, utilities connections, technology backbone, local area network/wide area network, sound and interpretation equipment, enhanced security and fire safety, back-up power, etc., at $820 per square metre	3 300 000
Other consultancy services	214 500
Project supervision	150 000
Contingency provision (5 per cent)	201 300
Total	**4 228 800**

IV. Options for implementation of the findings of the review

15. Based on the prioritization of the project components made in the course of the review, a provision of $1,427,000 has already been proposed under section 33 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 for the modernization of Conference Rooms 1, 5, 6, 7 and 8 to address the most urgent requirements.

16. For the financing of the modernization of Conference Rooms 2, 3 and 4, additional funding in the amount of $2,052,000 would be required. These requirements could be financed in part from the uncommitted balance of the construction-in-progress account. That balance, as at 30 June 2003, amounted to $913,300. Given the fact that the funds allocated in 2002 for the Economic Commission for Africa and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean construction projects will be utilized over a period of time, the overall balance of the construction in progress account continues to generate interest through investment.

17. On that basis, it is proposed to allocate an amount of $913,000 from the balance available under the construction-in-progress account as at 30 June 2003 towards the financing of the modernization of Conference Rooms 2, 3 and 4. Meeting the remaining costs, in the amount of $1,139,000, would require the identification of an additional funding source.

18. It is proposed to delegate the administrative responsibility for the implementation of the modernization of the existing conference facilities, to the Division of Administrative Services of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, which would exercise those responsibilities in close collaboration with the Division of Conference Services.

19. As regards phase II of the project, namely, the construction of the additional conference rooms A, B and C, as detailed in paragraph 11 above, the review showed, inter alia, that the use of the conference centre at the United Nations Office at Nairobi for major conferences was occasional. On the basis of the experience of recent years, it is expected that not more than one such major conference will take place at Nairobi annually; it should also be borne in mind that such conferences are usually financed from outside the United Nations programme budget. Furthermore, on the basis of current experience, it is not expected that the conference centre will be occupied by meetings more than 10 weeks a year, including meeting preparation time. On that basis, it is felt that it would be premature to propose the expansion of the facilities at this stage. The issue of the construction of additional facilities should be reviewed at a later stage in the light of experience to be gained from operating the modernized conference facilities of the United Nations Office at Nairobi. Should the General Assembly decide nevertheless to proceed with the construction, appropriate funding would be required.

V. Conclusion and recommendations

20. **The concern of the General Assembly over the availability of conference services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, as expressed in its recent resolutions, in particular in resolution 57/283 B, and the findings of the review undertaken by the Secretariat indicate that the modernization of the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi should be considered as a priority. In that case, in addition to the modernization component to be financed through the provision already included in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 under section 33 ($1,427,000) and the funding under the construction-in-progress account ($913,000), the remaining requirements for phase I of the modernization ($1,139,000) would be considered as being subject to provisions for the use and operation of the contingency fund within the meaning of part A, paragraph (b) (ii) of the annex to resolution 42/211 of 21 December 1987.**

21. **The review also indicated that the current conference facilities may not be sufficient to accommodate major United Nations system meetings and conferences at Nairobi. The construction of additional facilities could allow for further upgrading and expansion of the capacity of the United Nations Office at Nairobi to hold major United Nations system meetings or conferences. At the same time, the review indicated that the expanded facilities might not be sufficiently utilized due to the expected low frequency of such major meetings and to the overall comparatively low current utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi. Against this background, it is felt that the issue of expanding the conference facilities could be reviewed at a later stage in light of experience to be gained from operating the modernized conference facilities in 2006 and 2007.**

22. **The General Assembly is requested to authorize the modernization of the existing conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi for a total estimated cost of $3,479,000 (at current prices), to be funded from:**

(a) the proposed provision under section 33, Construction, alteration, improvement and major maintenance, of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005 ($1,427,000);

(b) the available uncommitted balance of the construction-in-progress account ($913,000);

(c) an additional provision to be authorized under the terms of resolution 42/211 governing the use and operation of the contingency fund, in particular under the terms of part A, paragraph (b) (ii) of the annex to that resolution ($1,139,000).

23. **It is recommended that phase II of the project, namely, the construction of three additional conference rooms, be considered for implementation at a later stage, to be determined on the basis of a review conducted in accordance with the building construction procedures outlined in the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions of 3 November 1981 (A/36/643) and in the light of experience gained from operating the modernized conference facilities of the United Nations Office at Nairobi during the biennium 2006-2007.**

Annex I

Existing and projected conference facilities capacity at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

	Present capacity in sq. m. (and seats); and interpretation equipment	Expected capacity in sq. m. (and seats) and interpretation equipment after the project implementation
Conference Room 1	878 (436); 6 languages	same
Conference Room 2	1,043 (528); 6 languages	*
Conference Room 3	276 (188); 4 languages	*
Conference Room 4	276 (188); 4 languages	*
Conference Room 5	41 (15)	same
Conference Room 6	75 (28); 2 languages	same
Conference Room 7	70 (28); 2 languages	same
Conference Room 8	56 (28); 2 languages	same
Offices	1,393	same
Additional facilities (passages, lounge etc.)	642	same
Additional construction:		4,026
Conference Room A Conference Room B Conference Room C		1,136 (540); 6 languages 684 (330); 6 languages 676 (330); 6 languages
Offices		540
Passages		990
	TOTAL 4,750 SQ. M.	**TOTAL 8,776 SQ. M.**
TOTAL NET ADDITIONAL CONFERENCE ROOM SPACE		**2,496 SQ. M.**
TOTAL GROSS ADDITIONAL CONFERENCE ROOM SPACE **		**4,026 SQ. M.**

* In addition to the proposed upgrading of Conference Rooms 2, 3 and 4, it is anticipated that the capacity of Conference Rooms 2, 3 and 4 combined will increase to 1,200 seats (at present 904) through rationalization of the space and replacement furniture. Sound recording and interpretation will be provided in six languages.

** The construction of three additional conference rooms would provide 2,496 square metres of usable conference room space. The difference of 1,530 square metres between the total conference space and total space provided for by the construction relates to common usage space, including the necessary passages, and rationalization of additional office space in the conference area for meeting officials, secretariat and organizers.

Annex II

Conference services workload at the United Nations Office at Nairobi

	1998/1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004-05 (projected)
Calendar meetings						
With interpretation	88	21	68	30	58	92
Without interpretation						
Subtotal	**88**	**21**	**68**	**30**	**58**	**92**
Non-calendar meetings						
With interpretation	496	379	253	371	385	794
Without interpretation	1 606	617	1 111	751	1 018	1 857
Subtotal	**2 102**	**996**	**1 364**	**1 122**	**1 403**	**2 651**
Calendar and non-calendar meetings						
With interpretation	584	400	321	401	443	886
Without interpretation	1 606	617	1 111	751	1 018	1 857
Total	**2 190**	**1 017**	**1 432**	**1 152**	**1 461**	**2 743**

	1998/1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004-05
Meetings held in Nairobi						
With interpretation	256	206	110	206	214	441
Without interpretation	1 606	617	1 111	751	1 018	1 857
Subtotal	**1 862**	**823**	**1 221**	**957**	**1 232**	**2 298**
Meetings held outside Nairobi						
With interpretation	328	194	211	195	229	445
Without interpretation						
Subtotal	**328**	**194**	**211**	**195**	**229**	**445**
All meetings held in and outside Nairobi						
With interpretation	584	400	321	401	443	886
Without interpretation	1 606	617	1 111	751	1 018	1 857
Total	**2 190**	**1 017**	**1 432**	**1 152**	**1 461**	**2 743**

Annex III

Sketch of possible expansion of conference facilities at the United Nations Nairobi complex